

a Congressman, I made a tour of the economically depressed areas of the State and other parts of the country. She was with me in April 1969, in Mexico City, Mexico, when I served as a delegate to the Mexico-United States Interparliamentary Conference. She was with me on all my trips to Europe and Asia. She was always there. Erma was always there with me at my side.

She is with me today, I know. For nearly 69 years, that woman, the greatest woman I ever met—I have met queens and great women of the world—was with me. She was always with me. She is with me now, I know. For nearly 69 years, she was my comfort in times of sorrow. She was stoic and brave. She never flinched in times of trouble.

We have lived and loved together through many changing years; we have shared each other's gladness and wept each other's tears; I have known ne're a sorrow that was long unsoothed by Erma; for thy smiles can make a summer where darkness else would be.

I quoted from the lines of Charles Jeffries, "We Have Lived and Loved Together."

This quiet, self-contained coal miner's daughter confronted demonstrators and protesters in front of our home in Arlington. She spent many evenings alone when I had to stay late at the Capitol attending the Nation's business. She always was most comfortable with the unassuming, down-to-earth West Virginia folks, back in the hills of West Virginia, like those back in the hills of Kentucky from which my friend, Senator MITCH MCCONNELL, comes. She met with kings and shahs, princes and princesses, Governors and Senators, Presidents. She entertained the high and the mighty, the powerful and the wealthy of this Nation in a foreign land because it was important to her husband who served as the majority leader of this Senate and various other Senatorial offices. She did it all with an innate, inherent graciousness, incredible patience, and a soft, warm smile. She was a remarkable lady of great wisdom, but most of all, great gentleness, yet she could be tough when she saw injustice or unfairness.

I was always so proud of her. In fact, the entire State of West Virginia took pride in Erma. That is why she was named West Virginia Daughter of the Year in 1990. Oh, could we call back the vanished years. And she was named West Virginia Mother of the Year a few years later.

Marriage is a sacred institution. It is more than the result of repeating a few vows. Marriage is an oath, an oath before God. I have admired the ancient Romans so much, as did Montesquieu, because they would not break an oath. They would go to their death rather than break an oath. The ancient Romans. So marriage is an oath before God, a sacred and noble contract between a man and a woman. Read it in the Bible.

It is a glorious commitment, a commitment of love, of caring, and of sacrifice. It is a commitment that Erma

and I honored and enjoyed for almost 69 years, through the bad times as well as the good, down the rough roads as well as the smooth ones. Our life's journey was not always smooth and easy traveling. In fact, it was as bumpy at some times and as curvy as a West Virginia mountain road. But over the years, Erma and I learned that the challenge of a marriage is the ability to overcome imperfections, not just to ignore them. We always remembered our devotion to each other, despite our shortcomings and despite the difficulties we encountered along life's way.

And when Erma and I married on that blessed Saturday evening nearly 69 years ago, we were so proud and we were so poor that I could not even take a day off from work. We did not have the money for a honeymoon, so after the wedding we went to a square dance, where I played the fiddle and she danced. On Monday morning, where was I? I was back at work in the grocery store in that coal-mining camp of Stotesbury. I was back at the meat counter in a coal-mining camp of Stotesbury. Although our fortunes did change, allowing us the opportunity to celebrate our anniversary in more special ways over the years, my Erma, my Erma never changed. She never changed. From being the wife of a meatcutter at the Koppers store in Stotesbury, WV, to being the wife of the majority leader of the U.S. Senate, Erma never stopped being herself. Her enduring patience and her steadfast support were the stabilizing constants in our marriage.

Could I have made this journey without her? Could I have accomplished as much as I have accomplished—whatever that may have been—without her? I think not. The more important point is that I did it with Erma, and I would not have had it any other way. She was God's greatest gift to me.

I don't know what I ever did to deserve her, but somewhere along the line, I must have done something that was especially good. The good Lord, the King, the Lord of Hosts, smiled down on me at 6 o'clock in the evening on May 29, 1937.

So may I close with these few words that come from a poem, "An Old Sweetheart of Mine," by James Whitcomb Riley.

Is this her presence here with me,
Or but a vain creation of a lover's memory?
A fair, illusive vision that would vanish into
air,

Dared I even touch the silence with the whisper of a prayer?

Nay, let me then believe in all the blended
false and truth—

The semblance of the old love and the substance of the new,

The then of changeless sunny days—the now
of shower and shine,

But love forever smiling—as that old sweetheart of mine.

Mr. President, I simply say that I give thanks to Almighty God for a long and good marriage and the richness which that hallowed institution has given to my life because of one very extraordinary woman.

May God bless her and hold her to his bosom in Heaven until I come to be with her—this extraordinary woman, the daughter of a coal miner, Erma James Byrd.

Mr. President, these are a few lines which were the favorite lines of Erma. The author's name is Isla Pascal Richardson. The lines are these:

If I should ever leave you,
Whom I love
To go along the silent way,
Grieve not,
Nor speak of me with tears.
But laugh and talk of me
As if I were there beside you.
For I will come—I'll come!
Would I not find a way?
Were tears and grief not be barriers?
And when you hear a song or see a bird I
loved,
Please do not let your thoughts of me be sad.
For I am loving you just as I always have
loved.

You were so good to me.
There are so many things I wanted still to
do—

So many things to say to you . . .
Remember, that I did not fear death.
It was just leaving you that was so hard to
face.

We cannot see beyond this life
But this you know . . . I loved you so
Never doubt that I am with you still!

Mr. President:

Love does not die with the body
And nothing in heaven or on earth
Can keep apart those who love one
another.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky is recognized.

A GREAT MARRIAGE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I congratulate my good friend from West Virginia on his extraordinary reminiscence of his remarkable wife of 68, almost 69 years. I think those of us in the Senate are well aware that the marriage of Robert and Erma Byrd was one of the great marriages of American history. No two people were ever more right for each other, ever more committed to each other, or provided a better example for our country than Senator and Mrs. Byrd.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I appreciate from my heart the kind words of my dear friend, Senator MITCH MCCONNELL, from our neighboring State of Kentucky. I am not sure that I was meant to have all these blessings, but I am sure of one thing: Erma was the perfect woman, the greatest woman I have ever met. And today I have no doubt that she is in Heaven. I also have no doubt that I can meet her.

Let me thank again my friend, MITCH MCCONNELL. How lovely were his words. How nice of him. I thank the Senator very much.

TRIBUTE TO FIRST LIEUTENANT ROBERT LEWIS HENDERSON II

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask the Senate to pause for a moment

today in loving memory and honor of 1st Lt Robert Lewis Henderson II.

Lieutenant Henderson of Alvaton, KY, served with the 2123rd Transportation Company in the Kentucky Army National Guard, based in Owensboro, KY. On April 17, 2004, he gave his life in defense of our country in the city of Ad Diwaniyah, Iraq. He had served his Nation as a citizen-soldier for 16 years—nearly half his life. Lieutenant Henderson was 33 years old.

On that day in April 2 years ago, as night approached, Lieutenant Henderson and three of his fellow soldiers were escorting a convoy of the Army's 1st Armored Division.

Their mission was to transport the 1st Armored Division, with its essential M1A1 Abrams tanks and missile launchers, toward the fierce fighting in Al Najaf, where Coalition forces battled the terrorists.

Staff Sergeant Michael Grimes, a fellow Kentuckian who was with Lieutenant Henderson in the Humvee, recalls that Rob "was proud to be in the Kentucky Guard and on the mission that day."

Lieutenant Henderson and his team drove through an area of Ad Diwaniyah that our troops have come to call "ambush alley." The foreboding nickname proved apt as Lieutenant Henderson's convoy, driving up the street, came upon an overturned tractor trailer in an intersection.

Lieutenant Henderson, who was driving the lead Humvee, tried to go around the obstacle, but as the escort team slowed, terrorists ambushed them.

Lieutenant Henderson sustained what proved to be a fatal gunshot in the leg, but he still managed to drive his team to a strategic position where they could return fire and then warn the convoy of impending danger. His final act was to protect his friends and fellow soldiers.

His actions "probably saved hundreds of lives," said Kentucky National Guard Adjutant GEN Donald Storm.

For his valorous service, Lieutenant Henderson was awarded the Bronze Star Medal and the Purple Heart. And he was awarded the Kentucky Distinguished Service Medal, for demonstrating all the qualities of a great soldier, remaining combat-focused while decisively engaged with the enemy, performing his duties, and accomplishing his mission.

Rob enlisted in the Kentucky National Guard in 1988, when he was just 17 years old, as a student at Warren Central High School in Bowling Green, KY. His mother, Lillian Henderson, recalls when he told her, "If you don't sign for me at 17, I'll sign for myself at 18."

Surely Rob knew the honor and the sacrifice that came with serving one's country. Rob's father, Robert "Lou" Henderson, served in the Army during the Korean War. Lou passed away after a struggle with cancer in 1994, but his son continued the family legacy.

After 8 years as an enlisted soldier, Rob felt he still had more to give. In 1997, he went to Officer Candidate School at Fort Eustis, VA. By 1998, he had made first lieutenant.

Lieutenant Henderson deployed to Kuwait in January 2004. Rob and his unit were charged with transporting convoys of heavy armored units which traveled from Kuwait to the front lines in Iraq.

As platoon leader, Rob was tasked with overseeing the complicated logistics of these missions. From scheduling maintenance on the heavy trucks to securing fuel, Rob's duties encompassed "most everything," recalled his friend SGT Doug Pollard, who also served in the Kentucky Guard.

Sergeant Pollard, who met Rob when Rob first enlisted, said that "from day one, Rob was about nothing less than hard work and taking care of other soldiers."

Lieutenant Henderson "led from the front," a popular Army expression for officers who lead by example on the front lines. Sergeant Grimes said, "Rob would never ask a man to do anything that he wouldn't have done himself."

1SG Michael Oliver, also of the Kentucky Guard, agreed. "Normally, as an officer you sit back, supervise and direct," he said. "Lieutenant Henderson loved . . . to get right in there."

Rob's passion for life shone through in his civilian duties as well. He worked as a sales manager at a Lowe's hardware store in Bowling Green. He had worked at several Lowe's stores throughout Kentucky, being promoted with each new post.

Working as much as 60-plus hours a week, Rob fulfilled his Guard training on the weekends, with the same commitment he showed in all aspects of life. While working at Lowe's, Rob also met Lisa, the love of his life. They married in January 2003.

Raised in Rockfield, a small Warren County town outside Bowling Green, Rob Henderson grew up playing football and baseball and cheering for the University of Notre Dame. He also had a fascination with trucks.

Rob worked hard on his home—especially the outside. Lisa Henderson recalls her husband's attention to detail, saying, "he was obsessed with mowing the grass, and just insisted that our yard look better than any of our neighbors." Often seen in jeans and work boots, he loved playing with his and Lisa's two dogs.

Rob was excitedly awaiting the birth of his and Lisa's first child. Lisa recalls hearing the excitement in Rob's voice when she called to tell him they would be having a baby. Rob was training with his platoon in Greenville, KY, and he was so thrilled that he raced off the phone to go tell his whole unit.

Peyton Joshua Henderson was born in July 2004, 3 months after a memorial service was held for Lieutenant Henderson in a small chapel erected at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

More than 150 of Lieutenant Henderson's fellow soldiers gathered inside.

Dozens more clustered outside the entrance, all to pay their respects to their fallen leader, brother soldier, and friend.

We thank Rob's wife Lisa for sharing her stories of Rob with us. She and young Peyton join us in the Capitol today. We are also honored that Rob's mother, Lillian Henderson, has shared her memories of her son. And today we are thinking of Rob's sister, Jackie Hawkins, and his half-sister, Monica Walker, as well.

Mr. President, I cannot help but feel humbled when I think of Lieutenant Henderson's final selfless act. A good soldier to the end, he put his men first. It is easy to see his heroism now, but when I look back at the brave 17-year-old who stepped forward to honor his father and his country, I can see the heroism was already there.

This Nation can never repay our heroes or their families, but we will never forget them.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

FORMATION OF A NEW IRAQI GOVERNMENT

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, last evening, during his press conference with Prime Minister Blair relative to Iraq, President Bush stated:

The formation of a new government represents a new beginning for Iraq and a new beginning for the relationship between Iraq and our coalition.

I hope that is not overly optimistic, but, frankly, I am afraid that it is because of the incompleteness of the Iraqi Government. Its two most important positions—the Minister of Defense and the Minister of the Interior—have not been filled. These are critical positions because numerous police and army units have been dominated by militia members who are loyal to sectarian or political leaders and not to the central Government, and because many militia members outside the police and the army are engaged in a rampage against innocent civilians.

While there have been disagreements on a number of issues related to Iraq, almost everyone has agreed that the new Iraqi Government would have to be a government of national unity with specific emphasis on independent non-sectarian choices for the positions of Minister of Defense and Minister of the Interior if there was to be a chance of quelling the sectarian violence and defeating the insurgency.

Our senior military leaders have been telling us for years that there is no military solution to the violence in Iraq and no way to defeat the insurgency without a political solution among the Iraqis themselves.

The Government that was announced last weekend and approved by the Iraqi Council of Representatives does not represent a political solution because it did not include the two most important ministries: the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior.